

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 01240 191212Z
ACTION NEA-10

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SUBJECT: EFFECTS ON LABOR PARTY UNITY OF RABIN-PERES CONTEST

1. AS THE RABIN-PERES RACE COMES DOWN TO THE WIRE, LABOR ACTIVISTS ARE BEGINNING TO PONDER THE EFFECT THE VICTORY OF ONE OR THE OTHER WILL HAVE ON THE PARTY. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT A PERES VICTORY WILL BE MORE DIVISIVE THAN THE REELECTION OF RABIN AS THE PARTY'S STANDARD BEARER. PERHAPS IN AN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN PARTY UNITY DESPITE THE OUTCOME, RABIN RECENTLY HINTED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS SERVING IN A PERES-LED CABINET, A POSSIBILITY WHICH HAD BEEN PRACTICALLY RULED OUT UP TO NOW. SPEAKING BEFORE A MEETING OF PARTY MEMBERS IN BEERSHEVA, RABIN STATED, ACCORDING TO AN ITIM CORRESPONDENT, "PERES WILL BE A MINISTER IN THE CABINET IF I AM TO FORM IT, AND VICE VERSA." THE STATEMENT WAS WELCOMED BY THE PERES CAMP, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF RABIN'S APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO SERVE UNDER PERES, BUT ESPECIALLY BECAUSE IT TACITLY ADMITTED THE POSSIBILITY

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 01240 191212Z

THAT PERES MIGHT WIN THE CONTEST. THE PERES CAMP HAS SINCE BEEN EXPLOITING RABIN'S STATEMENT IN ARGUING AGAINST THOSE WHO CLAIM A PERES VICTORY WOULD SPLIT THE PARTY.

2. IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR WHETHER THE CORRESPONDENT'S QUOTATION WAS ACCURATE. RABIN SUPPORTERS A FEW DAYS

LATER PUBLISHED A DIFFERENT VERSION OF WHAT THEY CLAIMED RABIN SAID. THEY QUOTED THE PRIME MINISTER AS STATING THAT PERES WOULD SERVE IN HIS CABINET AND THAT "FROM MY POINT OF VIEW, PERSONALLY, I WOULD PREFER TO THINK THAT THE OPPOSITE IS NOT POSSIBLE." REGARDLESS OF WHICH IS THE TRUE VERSION, THE STATEMENT INDICATES SOME CHANGE FROM RABIN'S ARGUMENT OF A FEW MONTHS AGO THAT A CABINET MINISTER COULD NOT EXPECT TO CONTEST THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND, IF HE LOST, STILL BE ASSURED OF A PLACE IN THE NEXT CABINET.

3. MEANWHILE, LABOR MK YITZAK BEN-AHARON, FORMER HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL AND WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS DOVISH VIEWS, TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 17 THAT HE WOULD NOT RUN FOR THE KNESSET ON A TICKET HEADED BY PERES. BEN-AHARON IS A MEMBER OF THE PARTY'S AHDUT AVODAH FACTION. HE WAS IMMEDIATELY CRITICIZED BY HIS KNESSET COLLEAGUE YITZHAK NAVON, CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE, A DOVE IN LABOR'S RAFI FACTION. IN AN ARTICLE IN DAVAR FEBRUARY 18, NAVON, WHO IS A PERES SUPPORTER, ARGUED THAT BEN-AHARON SHOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE SELECTION OF THE PARTY'S CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE HE HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD NOT ACCEPT THE MAJORITY DECISION SHOULD IT GO FOR PERES.

4. THESE STATEMENTS AND COUNTER-STATEMENTS ILLUSTRATE, WE BELIEVE, THE CURRENT STATE OF THINKING (AND CONFUSION) IN THE LABOR PARTY. AS FINAL EFFORTS ARE MADE TO ELICIT COMMITMENTS FROM DELEGATES AND AS PARTY LEADERS ANNOUNCE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 01240 191212Z

THEIR PREFERENCES (ESTHER HERLITZ FOR PERES, MESHEL FOR RABIN, ETC) IN THE LAST FEW DAYS BEFORE THE PARTY CONVENTION MAKES ITS CHOICE, MORE EMPHASIS IS BEING PLACED ON THE ANTICIPATED EFFECT OF THE CHOICE ON THE PARTY AND ON THE ALIGNMENT IN THE ELECTION ITSELF, AND ON THE LIKELY COMBINATION OF COALITION PARTNERS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

THUS, WE HEAR: A) RABIN (OR PERES) WILL UNITE (OR SPLIT) THE PARTY; B) PERES WOULD DRIVE MAPAM OUT OF THE ALIGNMENT; C) PERES, BECAUSE HE IS SOMETHING OF A CHANGE, (OR RABIN, BECAUSE HE IS MORE MODERATE) COULD MINIMIZE THE LOSS OF VOTES TO YADIN; AND D) RABIN WOULD BE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO YADIN IN A COALITION, WHILE PERES WOULD BE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE NRP OR EVEN THE LIKUD. THESE (OFTEN CONTRADICTORY) ARGUMENTS ARE NOW BEING GIVEN AS MUCH CONSIDERATION AS THE CANDIDATES' PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS, PER SE. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, FEW PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO MAKE ANY FLAT PREDICTIONS. ON ONE THING THERE IS AGREEMENT: THE RACE IS STILL TOO CLOSE

TO CALL.
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